

phase 1

DIDACTIC ORIENTATION

unit **1.3**

February 17

Theme:

**The Science of Social Psychology and Vice Versa II:
An Alternative Approach to Human Inquiry**

FACILITATION: **instructors**

PREPARATION OVERVIEW:

READ by **yourself** then DISCUSS in your **study group**:

On Paradigms

(a compendium of 3 documents authored or co-authored by S. L. Chorover)

- 1.3 – 1 Chorover, (1988) "Paradigms Lost and Regained",
in Ijiri, Y. and Kuhn, R. (eds.) New Directions in Creative and Innovative Management: Bridging Theory and Practice. Ballinger Publ. Co., Cambridge, MA., pp. 201-245

- 1.3 – 2 "Comparing and Contrasting Scientific Paradigms.",
table from the hardcopy (*WORKBOOK*) portion of an "electronic book" project intended to promote "sustainability" in a time of human/ecological crisis. (HomeWork: An Environmental Literacy Primer ©1995 Stephan L. Chorover/MIT), pp. 36-39.

- 1.3 – 3 Melucci & Chorover (1997) "Knowledge and Wonder: Beyond the Crisis of Modern Science?" in Flower, R.G., Gordon, T.F., Kolenda, N., and Souder, L. (eds.) Overcoming the Language Barrier: Problems of Interdisciplinary Dialogue, The Center for Frontier Sciences at Temple University, pp.76-90)

THINK OVER by **yourself**

then

DISCUSS in your **study group**:

Introductory Notes:

Last week, you read a good explanation of what contemporary "scientific social psychology" looks like from the vantage point of a leading experimental social psychologist who has done a great deal of important field and laboratory research.

This week, we consider an alternative (complementary rather than contradictory) view. Action Research (AR) has emerged due to the difficulty of studying the behavior of people and groups via "arms length" observation (or formal experimentation), and it demonstrates empirically the possibility of conducting credible scientific inquiry in contexts where the only vantage point available to the researcher is within the system to be studied.

AR proceeds through several reiterative cycles of action, observation, feedback, and revised action. In other words, intervention (action) and assessment (formative evaluation) are intimately intertwined in a compositely unified reiterative process.

Participatory Action Research – one of the main foci of AR today – emphasizes the collaborative character of all human inquiry. PAR has emerged as a critique of "the standard model of social research" which insists on keeping "research" and "action" separate and distinct. PAR, by contrast, entails a project organization and development process in which members of the group(s) in which collaborative learning is to be facilitated participate in all phases of the work.

"Where is Science Going?"

Read the following passage carefully. Read it aloud, slowly. If necessary, repeat until some relevant social psychological implications occur to you.

"Let us get down to bedrock facts. the beginning of every act of knowing, and therefore the starting point of every science must be our own personal experiences. I am using the word, experience, here in its technical philosophical connotation, namely, our direct sensory perception of ... things. These are the immediate data of the act of knowing. They form the first and most real hook on which we fasten the thought-chain of science; because the material that furnishes, as it were, the building stones of science is received either directly through our own perception of things or indirectly, through the information of others, that is to say from former researchers and teachers and publications and so on. There

are no other sources of scientific knowledge." (Max Planck, (1933) Where is Science Going? Chapter 2. *Is the External World Real?* p 33.)

Essential Issues:

- What is science? What is a scientific paradigm?
- Science (scientific findings, theories, hypotheses, conclusions, etc. as human social products).
- Is there "a" scientific method?
- Science and scientific frameworks
- Paradigms (theories and practices): conceptual and material aspects of human inquiry
- Modern science and social life (what is "the social psychology of science and vice versa"?)
- Science as progress: e.g. "from speculation to experimentation"
- Scientific communities as human social systems
- Relations between science and society
- Relevance of social psychology to the problem of defining and dealing with human social problems.
- Critically examine the idea of "value free science."
- What are scientific truths? Compare and contrast objectivity and inter-subjectivity?
- Resolved: science is whatever passes for credible knowledge of the world and its contents in any given human social group at a particular moment of time. Argue pro or con.

The Systems Perspective

What is "a system." What do we have when we have "an understanding" of something in "systems" terms?"

Here is a relevant "thought experiment":

Think of something about which you can say with some confidence that you "have an understanding of it as a system." Try to identify the component parts or constituents of your understanding of it. Do this before proceeding to the next paragraph!

Here is my own (S.L.Chorover) response. Please compare and contrast it with your own.

When I say that "I understand _____ as a system, I am making no claims to anything like complete or comprehensive knowledge of it. My understanding of the world and its contents is a notion that is and presumably must forever remain partial, incomplete and incurably perspectival – comprised of networks of relationships involving: things- or events- or objects- or persons- or observers-in-context.

My conception of the term "system" implies what psychologists refer to as a "gestalt" (a

whole); something discriminable as a set of interacting components "standing together" as a conceptually / materially compound and complex unity in a more or less distinctly "bounded" way; and having a more or less readily comprehensible relationship to things outside of and other than itself.

Beyond that, understanding a system means being able to contemplate it from at least three separate and distinct yet ultimately complementary perspectives – in terms of its (1) internal organization, (2) external relations and (3) the process by which it has come to be what it is."

Human brain is the particular system that I had in mind as I pondered the foregoing question, and the next question is whether you find my account of "systems understanding" to be in any way similar to or different from what you yourself came up with in your own example. If so, how? If not, why not?

How might a systems view apply to an understanding of the organization and development of the 9.70 collaborative learning system – especially in light of our "internal" vantage point? What do we know (what can we reasonably say) about (1) the constituents (individually / collectively) of the 9.70 system?; about their respective and collective composition, modes of organization and the sub-system level relations of parts, 2) about the nature and scope of its external relations, and 3) about its origins (growth, development, maturation ... etc.)

The two Scientific Perspectives we Explore

Here is a question to consider as we proceed: Do either, both or neither of the two scientific perspectives that we have been exploring offer a theoretically sensible, ethically appropriate and practically realistic scientific approach to the study of human mental activity and behavior in social contexts?

Think about it! And be prepared to discuss with groupmates and classmates.

Define and distinguish between "consensual validation" and "consensual disconfirmation." Consider the roles of both in the organization and development of scientific communities.

By now you should be able to identify, compare and contrast the noteworthy conceptual and material similarities and differences between the two paradigms – the two different scientific frameworks for defining and dealing with social psychological reality.